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ABSTRACT

The Adult Education Amendments of 1988 require the Department of Education to submit a report to Congress on the definition of literacy and then to estimate the extent of adult literacy. Literacy has been defined by self-report in early Census Bureau surveys, in a competency-based approach by the Adult Performance Level project, and as "the application of skills and knowledge across a variety of adult contexts" by the 1985 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP definition is being used by the National Workplace Literacy Project, and it has also been adopted by the Educaticnal Testing Service (ETS) for the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), which will assess a nationally representative sample of adults (ages 16 through 64) residing in private houses and college dormitories in the 48 contiguous states. About 12,500 1-hour, one-on-one interviews will be conducted. The assessment of literacy skills is planned to last 45 minutes, during which respondents will perform simulation tasks. The remaining 15 minutes will be devoted to obtaining background information. ETS will offer states the opportunity to conduct a concomitant State Adult Literacy Survey. (Lists of information contacts and committee members are appended.) (YLB)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

REPORT

TO CONGRESS

ON

DEFINING LITERACY

AND THE

NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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JULY 1990

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INTRODUCTION

The Adult Education Amendments of 1988 require the Department of Education to submit a report to Congress on the definition of literacy and then to estimate the extent of adult literacy in the Nation. To satisfy these requirements, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) cooperated to plan for a nationally representative household sample survey that will assess the literacy of the adult population of the United States in 1992. NCES awarded a 48-month contract for that purpose in September, 1989, to the Educational Testing Service (ETS), with a subcontract to Westat, Inc., for sampling and field operations. This report is intended to facilitate consultation with the Congress on the determination of the criteria for defining literacy prior to conducting a survey that will estimate the extent of adult literacy in the Nation.

1988 AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION

Section 383(b) of the Adult Education Act, as reauthorized by Public Law 100-297, states:

> **The Secretary, in consultation with the Congress shall, within the first 2 years after enactment of the Adult Education Amendments of 1988, make a determination of the criteria for defining literacy, taking into consideration reports prepared by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and others and shall identify concretely those skills that comprise the basic educational skills needed for literate functioning. The Secretary, once the definition of literacy has been determined, shall, in consultation with the Congress and using the appropriate statistical sampling methodology, determine an accurate estimate of the number of illiterate adults in the Nation.**

DEFINING LITERACY

A pervasive problem in the area of literacy has been the lack of a universal definition. This problem stems in part from a variety of differing points of view brought to bear on the issue by education researchers and practitioners, public policymakers, private-sector interests, and other concerned groups. It is reflected as well in the

broad range of definitions given to the term "basic skills" in Federal statutes and regulations that define the skills that constitute basic literacy.

The Adult Education Amendments of 1988 call for the Department to consider the work of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), as well as other research, in determining the criteria for defining literacy. The Department of Education, with the advice of Educational Testing Service and its Literacy Definition Committee, recommends adopting the definition previously used by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in its 1985 Young Adult Literacy Assessment. That study used the following definition of literacy:

> **Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.**

This definition approaches literacy by describing what adults do with printed and written information. It rejects an arbitrary standard, such as signing one's name, completing five years of school, or scoring at the eighth grade level on a test of elementary school reading achievement. In addition, this definition goes beyond simply decoding and comprehending text and implies that the information-processing skills adults use to think about the content of the text are part of the concept of literacy. The general terminology "using ... written information" is intended to imply writing as well as reading.

One consequence of using the 1985 NAEP approach to defining literacy is that the results will not produce a single number of illiterates, but will instead produce a variety of estimates that show the percentages of adults performing tasks at different levels of difficulty. Adopting the same definitional framework for the 1992 study of adults will have the same result: the survey will show the percentages of adults performing at various levels, but will not provide a single number of "illiterates."

The NAEP definition of literacy has been used only since 1985. At this point it is appropriate to review prior approaches to defining literacy and the considerations involved in adopting the 1985 NAEP definition of literacy for the 1992 survey.

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

The study of literacy rates in the United States began with the Census Bureau. In each decennial census from 1840 to 1930 and in sample surveys since then, individuals have been asked whether they could read or write in any language. The Bureau counted as illiterate all those who reported that they were unable to read and to write a simple message in English or in any other language. The historical record

shows a tremendous increase in self-reported literacy during the past hundred or so years. In 1870, 20 percent of the population reported themselves as illiterate, while in 1979, only 0.6 percent did.

Self-reported literacy is not a measure that is reliable and consistent with other evidence. The Census Bureau did not administer a test of literacy, but instead relied on people to report their own literacy, without defining it for them. Given that the demand for higher reading levels has increased greatly during this century, the stigma attached to illiteracy is likely to have increased, making it much more likely that false reporting occurs now than before. Further, the introduction in the 1920s of widespread testing of the knowledge and abilities of the population revealed that self-reports of literacy did not correspond with performance on tests, which led to questions about the value of self-reports.

Educational testing represents a considerable improvement over self-reporting, and over the years the technology of testing has improved. In the early days of testing, attempts were made to establish a criterion for literacy based on grade-level scores on a reading test. "Functional literacy" was equated with the attainment of a particular grade-level score on standardized tests of reading achievement. Using such tests, it was possible to estimate percentages of various population groups at or above specified reading grade levels. Persons performing at or above a specified level were considered to have adequate reading skills for materials or tasks judged to be of comparable grade-level difficulty. Those persons who failed to attain the specified level were labeled "illiterate" or "functionally illiterate" and were presumed to lack the reading skills necessary to function in contemporary society.

Over the past 60 years of testing, the criterion for judging adequate levels of reading skill has risen steadily from a third grade to an eighth grade level. As early as 1975, some researchers noted that demonstration of a twelfth-grade reading level was necessary to function effectively in a technological society.

The use of reading grade-level test scores as an indicator of literacy problems among adults has serious limitations. Grade-level scores are typically determined from the average performance of an in-school norming sample on multiple-choice questions covering a particular set of school-relevant reading passages. In contrast, research has shown that the literacy materials adults generally encounter in everyday experience go beyond the types of material associated with school-based standardized tests. As a result, performance on these school-based tests is often not a good predictor of performance on literacy tasks associated with non-school settings.

COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACHES

During the 1970s, some national studies of literacy attempted to go beyond school-related reading tasks by including a broader range of materials more like those that adults are likely to encounter at home, at work or living within their communities. The most publicized of these national surveys was the Adult Performance Level (APL) project, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education and conducted by the University of Texas in 1975-76. In addition to reading and writing skills, these assessments included measures of computation, problem solving, and interpersonal communication skills. Results were reported on performance measures as they interacted with content areas such as occupational knowledge, consumer economics, health, and law.

While the competency-based approach to assessing adult literacy represented a significant advance over traditional school-based measures of reading achievement, it also shared some of the same assumptions and limitations. In these studies, no attempt was made to analyze the tasks with respect to the cognitive processes required for successful response or to determine what factors contributed to task difficulty.

In addition, the national performance surveys employed the additive scoring model, summing across items to yield a single score. Thus, like the traditional approach, these surveys treated literacy as an ability distributed along a single continuum. Because the single point selected to represent the standard of literacy differed from survey to survey, the estimates of "illiteracy" or "functional illiteracy" among the adult populatioon varied widely, ranging from about 13 percent to as high as about 50 percent. While debate ensued as to the accuracy of the estimates of the extent of the illiteracy problem and the utility of a single benchmark or cutpoint, crigwcs pointed to the varying definitions of literacy employed, the different standards selected, and the differences among the tasks included in the various surveys as explanations for the noncomparability of results.

THE 1985 NAEP ASSESSMENT

The 1985 NAEP Young Adult Literacy Assessment extended the conception of literacy to take account of criticism of earlier surveys and to benefit from the rapid advancement in educational assessment methods. The survey designers developed a revised view of literacy as the application of skills and knowledge across a variety of adult contexts. The purpose of the 1985 assessment was to examine the extent and

nature of the illiteracy problem among young adults.

The 1985 study developed 105 tasks simulating the kind of problems adults normally encounter in daily life that require a broad range of literacy skills for successful completion. A few of the tasks were taken from a pre-existing NAEP in-school assessment of 17-year-olds, in order to measure young adults on a scale comparable to one used for secondary school students. These tasks required multiple-choice answers. All of the newly created simulation tasks, however, required a free response on the part of the reader. Sometimes the appropriate response was a short answer; sometimes the correct response was filling out a form according to certain instructions; sometimes the answer required writing one or more sentences; and sometimes the task required people to provide an oral response about what they had read. However, unlike conventional tests, none of the new simulation tasks asked the reader to choose the correct answer from a list of choices.

The simulation tasks were grouped into three families, based on conceptual and statistical criteria. The most familiar of the three kinds was prose comprehension. Prose tasks required the reader to understand and use information from expository or narrative texts, such as editorials, news stories, or poems. The simulations required the reader to locate information in the text, to write and interpret text, or to recognize and describe a theme or organizing principle in a text.

The second kind of simulation task involved identifying and using information contained in documents. Document simulation tasks required the reader to locate information in text that did not consist of connected discourse. The information was contained in a chart, table, graph, paycheck stub, order form, or list. The tasks required finding information while matching up to six information features and avoiding distracting information. Successfully responding to such tasks required an understanding of the hierarchical structure of indexes and the means for transferring information from one document to another.

The third kind of simulation task involved using arithmetic operations to solve problems embedded in printed material. Quantitative simulation tasks required the reader to locate, transfer, and operate on quantitative information contained in prose or document texts, such as bank deposit slips, checkbooks, order forms, menus, and advertisements. This kind of task required an understanding of how to use basic arithmetic operations, either singly or sequentially, to solve everyday problems.

The 1985 NAEP Young Adult Literacy Assessment made use of item response theory, a statistical method for scaling individual test items for difficulty in such a way that the item has a known probability of being correctly completed by an adult of a given proficiency level. This method quantifies the level of difficulty of each task along a scale, and the performance of individuals along the same scale, so that the likelihood of success on any item is a function of the item's characteristics and the

person's proficiency.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 are taken from the final report of the NAEP Young Adult Literacy Assessment and show the percentages of young adults and selected tasks at or above successive points on the prose, document, and quantitative literacy scales. For example, on the prose literacy scale, an adult with an ability score of 199 has an eighty percent chance of passing an item with a difficulty level of 199 (writing something about a job one would like). As shown here, 96 percent of the young adult population performed at that level or above. The reporting approach in these tables shows how the results of the 1992 study will be reported, and illustrates both the degree of difficulty for various tasks and the proportion of the population that performs at or above that level of difficulty.

Unlike previous studies, the 1985 NAEP study provided measures along three literacy scales for the different kinds of literacy, reported as the proportions of the population that perform at several different levels on each scale, described the kinds of skills needed to perform at each of the levels, and portrayed the performance profiles of several population subgroups.

LITERACY SURVEYS AND RESEARCH SINCE 1985

Currently, another Federal survey is using the same definition of literacy to assess the literacy skills of specific segments of the adult population. The National Workplace Literacy project, conducted for the Employment and Training Administration in the Department of Labor, is assessing three populations of adults on the margins of the labor force: applicants for unemployment insurance, job applicants at the U.S. Employment Service, and trainees under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program. The results, when reported, will be comparable to the findings of the 1985 NAEP Young Adult Literacy Assessment and to the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey.

In 1987, a symposium of the International Reading Association debated what literacy is and how it functions in a modern society, though the symposium participants did not expect to resolve the debate or to end the discussion. Participants agreed that a definition based upon school-related norms, such as grade-level scores or elementary school materials, is insupportable and counterproductive to effective adult instruction (though some believe such tests provide useful diagnostic information about adults).

These researchers and practitioners recognized that a single criterion level and, therefore, a single form of literacy--reading--does not adequately measure the ability of

Table 1--Percentage of 21- to 25-year-olds and selected tasks at or above successive points on the prose literacy scale.

Selected Tasks at Decreasing Levels of Difficulty**		Selected Points on the Scale	Total
		500	
397	Identify appropriate information in lengthy newspaper column		
387	Generate unfamiliar theme from short poem	375	8.8 (0.7)
371	Orally interpret distinctions between two types of employee benefits		
361	Select inappropriate title based on interpretation of news article	350	21.1 (1.1)
340	State in writing argument made in lengthy newspaper column		
339	Orally interpret a lengthy feature story in newspaper	325	37.1 (1.6)
313	Locate information in a news article	300	56.4 (1.5)
281	Locate information on a page of text in an almanac (3-feature)		
279	Interpret instructions from an appliance warranty		
278	Generate familiar theme of poem		
277	Write letter to state that an error has been made in billing	275	71.5 (1.4)
262	Locate information in sports article (2-feature)	250	82.7 (1.2)
		225	90.8 (0.7)
210	Locate information in sports article (1-feature)		
199	Write about a job one would like	200	96.1 (0.5)
		175	98.5 (0.2)
		150	99.7 (0.1)
		0	

**Number indicating difficulty level designates that point on the scale at which individuals with that level of proficiency have an 80 percent probability of responding correctly.

Table 2--Percentage of 21- to 25-year olds and selected tasks at or above successive points on the document literacy scale.

	Selected Tasks at Decreasing Levels of Difficulty**	Selected Points on the Scale	Total
		500	
365		375	8.8 (0.8)
343	Use bus schedule to select appropriate bus for given departures & arrivals	350	20.2 (1.3)
334		325	37.6 (1.6)
320	Use sandpaper chart to locate appropriate grade given specifications		
300	Follow directions to travel from one location to another using a map	300	57.2 (1.7)
294	Identify information from graph depicting source of energy and year		
278	Use index from an almanac	275	73.1 (1.2)
262	Locate eligibility from table of employee benefits		
257	Locate gross pay-to-date on pay stub		
255	Complete a check given information on a bill		
253	Complete an address on order form		
249	Locate intersection on street map	250	83.8 (1.0)
221	Enter date on a deposit slip	225	91.0 (0.8)
219	Identify cost of theatre trip from notice		
211	Match items on shopping list to coupons		
		200	95.5 (0.5)
196	Enter personal information on job application		
192	Locate movie in TV listing in newspaper		
181	Enter caller's number on phone message form		
169	Locate time of meeting on a form	175	98.4 (0.3)
160	Locate expiration date on driver's license		
110	Sign your name	150	99.7 (0.1)
		0	

**Number indicating difficulty level designates that point on the scale at which individuals with that level of proficiency have an 80 percent probability of responding correctly.

Table 3--Percentage of 21- to 25-year-olds and selected tasks at or above successive points on the quantitative literacy scale.

	Selected Tasks at Decreasing Levels of Difficulty**	Selected Points on the Scale	Total
489	Determine amount of interest charges from loan ad	500	
376	Estimate cost using grocery unit-price labels	375	9.5 (0.9)
371	Calculate & total costs based on item costs from catalogue		
356	Determine tip given percentage of bill	350	22.5 (1.4)
340	Plan travel arrangements for meeting using flight schedule		
337	Determine correct change using menu	325	37.8 (1.6)
		300	56.0 (1.4)
293	Enter & calculate checkbook balance		
289			
281			
281		275	72.2 (1.1)
		250	84.7 (1.0)
233	Total bank deposit entry	225	92.4 (0.6)
		200	96.4 (0.4)
		175	98.6 (0.2)
		150	99.6 (0.1)
		0	

**Number indicating difficulty level designates that point on the scale at which individuals with that level of proficiency have an 80 percent probability of responding correctly

individuals to function effectively in society and in the workplace at any given point in time. Participants agreed that "simple literacy scales that declare, ex cathedra, the number of illiterates in America are meaningless." They understood literacy to be a complex of skills. Assessing these multiple skills provides the best indicators of adult literacy in the United States.

A University of Delaware literacy expert, Richard Venezky, summarized the discussion of the 1987 symposium in the following terms:

> **Literacy denotes a collection of abilities within which specific ability zones can be designated for practical ends. At the lower levels of these abilities there may exist (but the evidence is not complete) a universal set of reading and writing skills necessary for self-sustained literacy growth. This zone represents a minimal level of functioning ability that is inadequate for many ordinary demands of an industrialized print society. Higher up the ability scale another zone can be defined, based upon criteria that vary for individuals and societies. This zone represents levels of literacy abilities that are required for full participation as an equal member of a specific society. This higher zone incorporates reading, writing, numeracy, and specific document processing skills, although the levels for these skills are not precisely defined for any known context. Furthermore, when literacy ends and problem solving, logical thinking, and related cognitive skills begin is also not well defined.**

THE 1992 NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

In early 1990, as a part of the National Adult Literacy Survey contract, a Literacy Definition Committee was appointed to advise ETS on the development and conduct of the upcoming assessment of adults. Among its responsibilities, this committee was charged with adopting a definition of literacy to serve as a guide for setting assessment objectives, as well as for constructing and selecting new literacy simulation tasks.

The Committee spent time at its initial meeting in February discussing issues related to adopting a definition of literacy. The Committee chose to begin its deliberations with the definition of literacy that formed the basis of the 1985 NAEP Young Adult Literacy Assessment:

> **Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.**

Consensus among the Committee quickly appeared that expressing the literacy proficiencies of adults in school-based terms is inappropriate, and that higher-order thinking skills are important to literacy.

The Committee addressed the question of incorporating areas such as teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, and communication skills into the definition. While the members agreed that these areas are important for functioning in various contexts, such as the workplace, there was also consensus that these areas are not part of literacy per se, and therefore should not be incorporated into the definition of literacy.

The Committee endorsed the idea that the definition of literacy must reflect multiple sets of skills placed along a continuum, rather than discrete skills that are context-bound. The Committee members agreed that the focus of the assessment should be on the knowledge and skills associated with using printed information across a broad variety of adult contexts that include work, home, and community. The Committee recommended that greater emphasis be placed on tasks requiring both written and oral responses, the use of calculators, and the description of the process of problem solving in the development of new exercises for the survey.

The Committee looked for a way to change the wording of the definition of literacy to reflect these emphases. For example, Committee members proposed "Using and producing printed and written information ..." but noted that machines, not people, produce printed information and that the term "using" includes the notion of "producing." Moreover, in continued discussions, the Committee concluded that further suggested changes in wording tended to narrow, rather than broaden, the definition of literacy. The Committee therefore adopted unanimously the 1985 definition to guide the development and conduct of the National Adult Literacy Survey.

The Committee further agreed that literacy should be measured not along a single continuum, but rather in terms of the three dimensions used in the 1985 Young Adult Literacy Assessment: prose, document, and quantitative literacy. The Committee favored the idea that the definition be broad enough to encompass numerous scales--perhaps extending beyond the three aspects of literacy captured by the existing NAEP scales to include skills in oral and written production. However, the Committee recognized the practical resource constraints on the survey and did not recommend assessing more than the three scales of prose, document, and quantitative literacy. While there is no separate scale for "writing literacy," each of the three scales--prose, document, and quantitative literacy--requires the ability to write.

In its deliberations, the Committee distinguished between establishing a definition of literacy and setting standards based on that definition. The members noted that the concept of standards, within a pluralistic society, requires some provision for variation by social context. Rather than setting a single standard for

literacy, the Committee dgwided to provide an interpretive framework for each of the three literacy scales and agreed that some of its members, in cooperation with external consultants, would work toward identifying levels of performance for each of the scales, along with a description of the knowledge and skills represented at each level. Once established, these levels would be used in reporting results to various audiences.

CONDUCTING THE 1992 NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

A competitively-awarded contract with the U.S. Department of Education to ETS and Westat authorizes ETS and Westat to establish a Literacy Definition Committee and a Literacy Technical Review Committee to guide the activities of the National Adult Literacy Survey. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) monitors this project and consults with the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and other agencies on project matters.

The purpose of the National Adult Literacy Survey is to report on the nature and extent of the literacy skills demonstrated by adults over age 16. Information from the survey will:

- Describe the levels of literacy demonstrated by the total population as well as targeted "at risk" groups.
- Characterize demonstrated literacy skills in terms of demographic and personal background characteristics.
- Describe the literacy skills of workers in various occupational categories.
- Compare assessment results with those from the 1985 Literacy Assessment of Young Adults conducted by ETS under a grant from the U.S Department of Education and the 1989-90 Workplace Literacy Survey conducted by ETS under contract with the U.S. Department of Labor.
- Interpret the findings related to information-processing skills and strategies in a way that can guide curriculum decisions pertaining to the education and training of adults.
- Provide an increased understanding of the educational skills and knowledge associated with functioning in a technological society.

The activities of the National Adult Literacy Survey project will be conducted over a period of four years (1989 to 1993), according to the timeline negotiated in the contract with ETS and Westat. The data will be collected through household interviews in which respondents complete written and oral exercises that assess their literacy skills. The adult literacy study includes four major components:

COMPONENT	TIME
Convening adult literacy and assessment experts to adopt a working definition of literacy--a definition that will guide the objectives of the assessment and the development of simulation tasks--and to recommend appropriate background questions.	1990
Conducting a field test to check on the effectiveness of several aspects of the survey design.	1991
Collecting literacy assessment data in 1992 through a nationally representative household survey of adults.	1992
Reporting on the literacy skills of adults.	1993

Three non-technical reports profiling the literacy skills of the adult population in the United States will be published in late 1993. The first report will address the following issues: a) types and levels of literacy characterizing the total adult population; b) the relationships of literacy profiles to the personal characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences of adults; and c) the literacy profiles of targeted "at risk" subgroups. The other two reports will discuss the implications of the findings for the business and education communities. In addition to the multiple reports appropriate for the general audiences, codebooks and technical manuals will be developed in support of public-use data tapes to assist in secondary analyses.

The remainder of this section provides a brief overview of the survey design, the background questionnaire, and the two committees that provide different kinds of advice, the Literacy Definition Committee and the Technical Review Committee.

NALS DESIGN

The National Adult Literacy Survey will assess a nationally representative sample of adults (ages 16 through 64) residing in private houses and college dormitories in the 48 contiguous states of the United States. About 12,500 interviews will be conducted by 175 experienced interviewers. The Department is currently examining

options for the survey to include those over 65, which would increase the sample size by about 2,200 cases. Individuals from Black and Hispanic groups will be oversampled to assure reliable estimates of literacy proficiencies for those groups. In addition, the sample will contain a sufficient number of individuals in the age range 21 through 25 to enable comparisons with the 1985 Literacy Assessment of Young Adults.

The target population excludes adults not living in households – the homeless, the incarcerated, those in the military living in barracks or group quarters, and those living in hospitals or in religious institutions. The assessment will be conducted only in English since the purpose of the survey is to obtain information on the nature and extent of English literacy skills among the adult population.

The survey is designed to be carried out in a one-to-one home (or dormitory) interview lasting approximately one hour. The assessment of literacy skills is planned to last approximately 45 minutes, during which respondents will be asked to perform the simulation tasks described earlier in this report. The remaining 15 minutes will be devoted to obtaining background information that can be related to performance on the simulation tasks. A field test will determine the cost effectiveness of an incentive payment for respondent cooperation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The background questionnaire, lasting approximately 15 minutes, will build upon issues identified in the 1985 NAEP assessment and the 1989-90 Workplace Literacy Survey. Those questionnaires covered family background (e.g., parental education, parental occupation, home environment including language(s) spoken/read, availability of reading materials, size of household), respondent characteristics (e.g., when and where born, race/ethnicity, income level, occupation/employment status), educational experiences (e.g., years of education in and out of this country, types and duration of training, including military and industry, reasons for not completing high school, type of secondary school curriculum, participation in and completion of GED), labor market status, (e.g., occupation, industry, wage rate, labor force participation), self-perceptions of literacy needs (e.g., adequacy of skills, expectations for obtaining further literacy training, literacy requirements on the job, participation in community activities and in elections), and literacy practices at home, on the job, and in the community (e.g., topics and context read in newspapers, magazines, and books).

THE LITERACY DEFINITION COMMITTEE

The Literacy Definition Committee is composed of researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and representatives of organizations and associations who are nationally recognized experts in the field of literacy and basic skills (see Attachment). The Committee was appointed by ETS in February, 1990, after consultation with the Department of Education.

Nonvoting members of the Committee include U.S. Department of Education representatives from the National Assessment Governing Board, the National Center for Education Statistics in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and the Division of Adult Education and Literacy in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Committee meetings are open to observers, including representatives from other Federal agencies, national organizations and associations, Congressional offices, and the general public.

The responsibilities of the Committee are:

- To reach consensus on a definition to guide the National Adult Literacy Survey.
- To operationalize the definition of literacy into a measurable set of objectives.
- To guide the development and selection of a set of simulation tasks to be performed by respondents participating in the survey.
- To reach consensus on a framework for reporting results to the general public.

The Committee has held two meetings in 1990, on February 26-27 and April 23-24, in Washington, D.C., to begin the process of adopting a definition and developing objectives and assessment tasks. In February, the Committee adopted the definition used in the 1985 NAEP Literacy Assessment of Young Adults as the framework for NALS. On the basis of this definition, the Committee will develop a set of assessment objectives that will serve as the blueprint for incorporating NAEP literacy tasks into the assessment and for constructing new exercises.

THE TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

To meet the needs of the assessment, a 10-member panel was appointed in May 1990 to provide technical assistance and expertise throughout the conduct of the National Adult Literacy Survey. The Committee will provide technical expertise on the quality of the assessment design, the quality of the analysis plan, the quality of the interpretive framework adopted to report results, and the quality of the sampling design and field work. The Committee's first meeting is scheduled for July 1990.

FUNDING

At present, the National Adult Literacy Survey project is jointly funded by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) in the Department of Education. The Department of Education is actively encouraging states to fund supplemental samples using comparable methods that will produce state-level literacy statistics. The Department of Education is seeking to coordinate the activities of this survey with other agencies that have program responsibilities for older adults, such as the Administration on Aging and other parts of the Department of Health and Human Services. For example, the contract includes an option for a supplemental sample of Federal civilian employees, to be funded by the Office of Personnel Management.

Cost estimate for the project:

ADULT LITERACY	FY 1989	FY 1990	FY 1991	FY1992
1992 SURVEY	1400	900	3500	2855

* Funds in $1000s

OPTIONS FOR CONCURRENT STATE SURVEYS

As requested by the U.S. Department of Education, ETS will offer States the opportunity to conduct a concomitant State Adult Literacy Survey that would be comparable to the National Adult Literacy Survey. States would contract directly with

ETS and must determine, by January 1991, if they wish to contract for a supplemental sample.

States are being informed about these options through cooperative information dissemination by the Department of Education and the National Governors' Association. In addition, during March and April 1990, representatives from ETS have made presentations to State Adult Education Directors and State Literacy Coordinators at regional workshops conducted by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy and at the National Conference of State Literacy Initiatives. Reports on State surveys will be issued following the reports on the National Adult Literacy Survey in 1993.

INFORMATION CONTACTS

Further information on the National Adult Education Survey is available from the following contact persons:

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